

ISLAM
AND
OTHER RELIGIONS

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I

There is, to my mind, a point about religion which, if we disregard, we can never get to any understanding of religious matters. It is that, in one respect at least, religion offers a distinct contrast to science. Both science and religion, are, in a sense, bodies of organized knowledge. But while science primarily depends on human intelligence and grows out of the continual elaboration of ordinary sense-experience by successive generation of individuals, religion grows out of certain communications which are claimed to have been received directly by individual founders from the Divine Being. The stronger appeal of religion has always been, and is, because of the authority which is claimed for it by reason of its source in alleged Divine communion. On the distinctiveness of its source depends the distinctiveness of religion, and but for this, religion will hardly command the interest which it does.

In a comparative study of faiths, therefore, our first question should be: Is it reasonable to accept, on the whole, the alleged authority of religion to determine the belief and conduct of man? The authority of religion is the authority of individual founders who, when they come, claim contact with the Divine and offer their own testimony as proof of this contact. Our question, therefore, becomes: Is the testimony of religious teachers creditable? It seems to me that such testimony would be creditable provided it is (1) sincere and (2) veridical. In other words, such testimony in order to be credited, should be above the possibility of imposture, as well as of mental disorder.

Now most people would agree, that in the case, at any rate, of a good many of the founders of religions, the criteria of sincerity and of soundness of mind are pre-eminently fulfilled. In ordinary life, when we come across a sincere friend, we develop a sincere attachment towards him. We love him and are loyal to him. We are ready even to suffer for him. Religious teachers succeed in inculcating these reciprocal

sentiments, not only in their immediate followers, but in generations of multitudes who come after them. In fact, there is nothing in human relations which can be compared to the attachment and loyalty with which the followers of a religion hold their founder. On the other hand, it is impossible to entertain the idea that religious personalities suffer from delusive experiences. For, their general mental calibre and achievement rule out such a possibility. They display a high degree of intelligence, consistency of judgment, and a considerable practical ability. They offer startling ethical discoveries and promulgate principles which have results more far-reaching than those due to any other type of teaching. Both at the time of their advent and subsequent to it, they are regarded with a peculiar seriousness by all kinds of people. Their followers owe allegiance to them, and their opponents continue to regard them with unabated hostility. Individuals who succeed in generating towards themselves such serious attitudes in the minds of multitudes, may be anything but unsound in mind. It seems to me that the attempt to attribute unsoundness of mind to a religious personality, is frequently only an after-thought of the unbelieving temperament.

Most people, therefore, will agree that we are bound to acknowledge the testimony of, at any rate, a good many of the founders of religions as both sincere and veridical. What I wish to maintain, however, is not merely that the testimony of many of the great founders of religions must be acknowledged as being both sincere and veridical, but that such acknowledgement cannot be withheld in the case of any of the founders, who have left well-established traditions behind them and who are looked upon with reverence by vast numbers of human beings. The criteria of sincerity and soundness, which apply to any one of them, apply equally to every other. If some of us feel disposed to question either the sincerity or sound-mindedness of any of the great founders, it would be impossible for us to demonstrate sincerity and sound-mindedness of any other. I mean, in brief, that, in this respect, founders of religions stand or fall together. Their lives, their claims and the general character of their achievement, are so similar that it is impossible to discriminate between one and another of them.

II

Having agreed that religions owe their rise to personalities who claim direct relationship with the Divine Being, and whose claim in this regard is equally sincere and veridical, it becomes something of a puzzle to have to choose between them. We cannot accept any one of them if the acceptance of one means the rejection of any of the others. On the other hand, we cannot accept all of them, because the various determinate forms in which we find them formulated today seem to contradict one another. Here, therefore, is a tangle, and out of this tangle there is, as far as I can see, only one way open, and this is to examine all the extant systems and see if we cannot find one amongst them which unambiguously affirms the truth of the founders of all the others, and at the same time provide its own *raison d'être* in the presence of them all. If we agree to solve the comparative problem of religion along this general line, I think we should be further ready to agree that Islam, the religion revealed about A.D. 600, has some advantage over all the others. This advantage consists in its historical position. Being the last of the great systems which have had their rise one after the other, it is at least in a position to review all the others. Any earlier system will necessarily exclude out of account the later ones, and it is obvious that only the last of them can give an account of all of them.

I do by no means imply that Islam is the presiding member of the hierarchy of religions only because it happens to be the last in order of time. What I mean is that its historical position at least confers on it an advantage which the others do not share. In order to show why I would rather identify myself with Islam than with any other extant system, it is incumbent upon me to show that Islam does acknowledge the truth of all the other founders of religions, and that it does provide an adequate *raison d'être* for itself in the presence of the other religious traditions. It is further incumbent upon me to show that, being derived from the same Divine source from which other religions have been derived, Islam has been anticipated by those other traditions. In short, in order to justify why I profess Islam rather than any of the other faiths, I want to establish at

least the following three points:-

1. That Islam acknowledges all the earlier religious messages;
2. That it provides an adequate *raison d'être* for itself;
3. That it has been anticipated by the earlier messages.

III

The first point, then, concerns the acknowledgement by Islam of the founders of other religions. It is being increasingly recognised today that the various religious teachers, known to human history, together form a most reverential company, everyone of whose numbers has had Divine light to guide him and every one of whom showed to millions of men the way to righteousness. With Islam, however, it is not an after-thought, but a recognised article of faith. No Muslim can be a Muslim, unless he acknowledges the Divine character of the messages imparted to different peoples at different periods of history through different individuals. This fact, that Divinely-inspired apostles were raised in every country or community to guide the people, is not only consistent with the universal Providence of God, but is clearly stated in the Quran. Here are some passages:

“There is not a nation but a Divinely-inspired warner has passed among them” (35:24).

“To every people was sent an Apostle” (10:47).

“And We assuredly sent amongst every people an Apostle, with the command: Serve God and eschew evil” (16:36).

“The same religion has He established for you (O Muslims!) as that which He enjoined on Noah—that which He has sent by inspiration to thee (Muhammad)—and that which He enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein” (42:13).

The Quran orders the Muslims to have faith in the prophets of each and every nations:

“Say ye: We believe in God, and the revelations given to

us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all Prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to God in Islam" (2:136).

It is obvious that most of the Biblical prophets have been named and acknowledged; others have been acknowledged by the general affirmation that no people have been without a Divinely-inspired apostle, and there is clear indication in the Quran that many of the prophets have not been named in the Book. Thus:

"He did aforetime send Apostles before thee: of them there are some that He has mentioned to thee, and some that He has not mentioned to thee" (40:78).

The Quran is not a book of history; it only mentions a few of the prophets as examples. But it enjoins faith in the prophets of all the nations, whether mentioned by name or not. The Holy Prophet Muhammad regarded Zoroaster (though he is not mentioned in the Quran) as a Divinely-inspired Prophet and Zoroastrians as a People of the Book. Similarly the other religious teachers, such as Buddha, Krishna, Confucius, Lao Tzu and Mo Ti will command the reverence of Muslims, as they all fall within the scope of the lines I have quoted.

The equal acknowledgement of religious teachers by Islam is also apparent from the fact that Muslims do not call themselves Mohammadans. For, their attachment is rather to the purpose of God than to the person of Muhammad. One who submits to the Divine purpose is a Muslim. Muhammad himself has been called a Muslim. Similarly, other apostles and their followers were Muslims and have been so called in the Quran. To this, however, the Rev. Dr. Wherry, the author of a commentary on the Quran, has raised an objection that they cannot be so-called, as, according to him, they did not follow the injunctions laid down for Muslims in the Quran. The objection is not in the least reasonable. The Quran does by no means imply that the previous prophets observed the detailed ordinances of the Quran. It only implies that they followed the

true Divinely-inspired faith of their own day, which, in the essentials, was not different from Islam. The details of Divine ordinances underwent change from age to age, but the essential teachings remained the same. The followers of the earlier prophets were Muslims, because they, in their time, submitted to the teaching of God.

I must here point out the position of the Quran regarding the Founder of Christianity. According to the most widespread Christian belief, Jesus was the incarnation of God. The doctrine of the Deity of Jesus is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Creed. The Quran does not countenance this view. In fact, the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus is categorically denied in many places in the Quran. Jesus is glorified as an Apostle like other Apostles and his humanity is stressed by constantly referring to him as Jesus son of Mary. Thus:

“Jesus, son of Mary, God’s messenger” (4:157).

“An Apostle to the Children of Israel” (3:49).

“Then, in their wake, We followed them up with others of Our apostles: We sent after them Jesus, the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who truly followed him compassion and mercy” (57:27).

The divinity of Jesus is more explicitly denied in the following verse, in which it is also asserted that Jesus himself was not a party to this Christian belief:

“Most certainly they have chosen disbelief who say that God is the Christ, son of Mary. For the Christ said: ‘O children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord’ (5:72).

This verse of the Quran is fully supported by what we find in the Gospels. Jesus Christ referred to God as “My Father and your Father, and my God and your God” (St. John’s Gospel 20:17), and said:

“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve” (St. Matthew 4:10).

In fact, he denied his own divinity and perfection in words which leave no room for doubt or uncertainty:

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but One, that is, God” (St. Mark 10:18).

In acknowledging the previous founders of religions, therefore, the Quran is aware of the prevailing Christian belief about Jesus, and clearly lays down its position in regard to it. It is further significant to see that among Christians themselves, there are growing bodies like the Unitarians and the Free Churchmen, who deny that Jesus at all regarded himself as being more than human. Among some accredited members of the Church of England, too, the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus is being given an interpretation which is more and more in conformity with the teaching of the Quran.

Thus, while affirming faith in all the founders of religions and accepting their original teachings as being from God, the Quran at the same time makes it clear that they were all human beings, who were inspired by God. Like Jesus, Buddha and Krishna were also Apostles, who, after their passing away, were raised to the divine pedestal by their over-enthusiastic and superstitious followers and their images began to be adored.

IV

I must now pass on to the second point, viz., whether Islam provides an adequate *raison d'être* for itself, in the presence of other religious traditions. Referring to pre-Islamic times, the Quran points out:-

“Both land and water have become corrupt on account of the excesses of men” (30:41).

In the language of the Quran, dry land means human wisdom unaided by Divine communications, and water stands for what is vouchsafed to man directly by God. The verse would, therefore, mean that the excesses of men had dulled their innate moral consciousness. On the other hand, the light which was to be had from the Scriptures had also lost its power and

purity. Human interpolations had interfered with the Divine Word and rendered it untrustworthy. Modern research has confirmed the Quranic statement that the sayings and teachings of the pre-Islamic prophets (like Moses, Jesus, Krishna, Buddha and Zoroaster) have not been faithfully recorded and that many alterations have been made in the Scriptures from time to time. Thus, regarding the alterations that were frequently made in the Gospels and other books of the New Testament, the Rev. J.R. Dummelow writes the following in his famous *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (p. xvi):-

“To begin with, the writers of the Gospels report in Greek (al-though they may have had some Aramaic sources) the sayings of Jesus Christ who for the most part probably spoke Aramaic. Nor is it likely that these writers or their copyists had any idea that their records would go beyond the early Churches with which they themselves were familiar. The same applies to St. Paul. His letters, now so valued, were messages only intended for the Churches to which they were addressed. Those who first copied them would not regard them at all ‘sacred’ in our sense of the word. Nor even in the later centuries do we find that scrupulous regard for the sacred text which marked the transmission of the Old Testament. A copyist would sometimes put in not what was in the text, but what he thought ought to be in it. He would trust a fickle memory, or he would even make the text accord with the views of the school to which he belonged.”

Religious truths being based on the revealed Word of God, the human interpolations in the pre-Islamic scriptures have rendered them untrustworthy. Hence the Quran was sent to bring mankind back to God.

There is a further reason to justify the coming of a new Prophet and a new teaching (Islam). The earlier apostles were meant for particular periods and places. None of them ever stressed his universality. Moses continually addressed himself to the people of Israel. Similarly, Jesus insisted that he had been sent to the children of Israel, and to them alone. It is

well known that Jesus prohibited preaching to the Gentiles. To give his own words:

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (St. Matthew 15:24).

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (St. Matthew 10:5-6).

On the other hand, the Prophet Muhammad was sent as a Messenger to all mankind and the universality of the Quranic teaching is repeatedly stressed:

"We have not sent thee (O Muhammad!) save as a mercy for the people of the world" (21:107).

"Say (O Muhammad): 'O mankind! I am sent unto you all, as the Apostle of God, to whom belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He'" (7:158).

"Blessed is He who has revealed unto His servant (Muhammad) the Criterion of right and wrong that he may be warner to all mankind" (25:1).

That the Holy Prophet himself conceived his mission in universal terms, is unmistakably reflected in his career. When the Prophet and his small band of followers were running the risk of losing their lives, and the prospect of Islam acquiring the slightest foothold seemed impossible, the promise was announced by him that God will raise witnesses for him from every nation. The Prophet anticipated the universal realization of his message by describing some of his earliest converts as being the first-fruits of the respective countries to which they belonged. Bilal, an Abyssinian, for instance, was described by him as the first-fruit of Africa, and a Greek slave as the first-fruit of Greece. He further and unequivocally anticipated his universality by those plain messages of Islam, which he addressed to all the known sovereigns, at a time when they were far too proud and powerful to take any notice of him.

The Quranic message, however, is not merely universal in

scope. It is clearly indicated that it is also the final teaching. The earlier prophets did not bring complete guidance from God, but only as much as was needed by the particular people and age for which they were sent. But the Prophet Muhammad came with the complete and perfect guidance for all mankind and all time.

“This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion” (5:4).

As a corollary to this, it is stated that the Quran will, for all time, be protected from human interpolation. Thus it is said:

“We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it from corruption” (15:9).

It is significant that the Quran, in the matter of the protection of its text, stands alone among religious scriptures. It is, to this day, read in the language and order of the original. The language of its text is a living language, preserved to this day in the speech of millions of people. Every syllable, in fact, every vowel-point of the Quran, according to both Muslim and non-Muslim opinion, is identical with the verses as they were originally revealed to the Holy Prophet and were made available by him to his people.

I will close this part of my account by a brief comparison of the conceptions of God in the major religions, to show how those religions, though originally from God, had by the time of the Prophet Muhammad's advent, deviated from the truth. Belief in God is the very essence of religion. It forms the basis of the transformation of character and of the reformation of the society. Religion is revealed to show man the way to God and the goal of religion is union with God. Every prophet, in his day and to his own people, enjoined faith in the unity of God; but at the time when the Prophet Muhammad was born (i.e. in the sixth century A.D.), this doctrine had been all but forgotten in the different religions. The Jews believed in a tribal God, “the Lord God of Israel”, and regarded themselves as His “chosen people”. He was a “jealous” God, who “visited the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto

third and fourth generation." The Christians had joined two other persons with God in His Godhead and had thus invented the doctrine of the Trinity. Their view of God was that He had condemned the whole human race because of the sin of disobedience committed by Adam and that He demanded blood to forgive the sins of mankind. St. Paul declared: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrew 9:22). The Zoroastrians had personified the six chief attributes of God and made them into separate Gods. They had also revived the pre-Zoroastrian worship of the Yazatas, or the so-called minor gods. The Hindus had a large pantheon of gods and goddesses, apart from their Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. They worshipped God in many fantastic forms and images. Coming now to the Buddhists: while one sect, the Hinayana had totally rejected God, the other sect, the Mahayana, had made the Buddha himself into the incarnation of God and they also worshipped a large number of other deities.

Islam came and rejected all these views and revived and established the doctrine of the unity and perfection of God in its pristine purity.

The Quran says:

"Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds" (1:2).

"Your God is one God: there is no God but He, the All-loving, the All-merciful" (2:155).

"Say: He is God, the one and only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him" (112:1-4).

"God is He, than whom there is no other God; — who knows all things both secret and open: He, the most Gracious, most Merciful. God is He, than whom there is no other God; the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of peace and perfection, the Guardian of faith, the Preserver of safety, the Exalted in might, the Irresistible, the Supreme. Glory to God! High is He above the partners that they attribute to Him. He is God, the

Creator, the Evolver, the Bestower of forms. To Him belong the most beautiful names: whatever is in the heavens and on the earth, doth declare His praises and glory: and He is the Exalted in might, the Wise" (59:22-24).

While comparing the Christian and Islamic conceptions of God, Edward Gibbon, the famous historian, writes the following in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (The Modern Library edition, volume 2, pp. 659-660):

"The Christians of the seventh century had insensibly relapsed into a semblance of paganism; their public and private vows were addressed to the relics and images that disgraced the temples of the East: the throne of the Almighty was darkened by a cloud of martyrs, and saints, and angels, the objects of popular veneration. . . . The mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation appear to contradict the principle of the divine unity. In their obvious sense, they introduce three equal deities, and transform the man Jesus into the substance of the Son of God: an orthodox commentary will satisfy only a believing mind. . . . The Creed of Mohammed is free from suspicion of ambiguity; and the Koran is a glorious testimony to the unity of God. The Prophet of Mecca rejected the worship of idols and men, of stars and planets on the rational principle that whatever rises must set, that whatever is born must die, that whatever is corruptible must decay and perish. In the Author of the universe his rational enthusiasm confessed and adored an infinite and eternal being, without form or place, without issue or similitude, present to our most secret thoughts, existing by the necessity of His own nature, and deriving from Himself all moral and intellectual perfection. These sublime truths, thus announced in the language of the prophet, are firmly held by his disciples, and defined with metaphysical precision by the interpreters of the Koran."

And this is what the great scholar of world religions, Dr. Duncan Greenlees, writes on the same subject in his

Gospel of Islam (p. xxviii):

"The healthy balance Islam insists upon between Faith and Works was a needed corrective to the doctrine that a God's suffering has magic power to take away our sins if we declare belief in it. The great trend in the modern West towards unitarian belief and Theism is largely due to the influence of Islam as Europe's nearest neighbour."

To sum up: According to Islam, all great religions came from the same Divine Source, but today they differ among themselves: (1) because most of the scriptures have not been preserved in their pristine purity; (2) because the pre-Islamic religions were revealed for particular nations and for a limited period, and, though the fundamental doctrines of the original message of each prophet were identical and timeless, those messages also contained many things which were not of universal significance; and (3) because they did not provide complete guidance but only as much as was needed by the people and the age for which each had been revealed. Thus Islam was needed to sift the human interpolations from the divine revelations in the earlier scriptures and to revive and restate the true religion of God. Islam is unique in the sense that its scripture, the Quran, has come down to us without alteration of any kind. Moreover, it provides complete and perfect guidance and is meant for all nations and for all time.

V

Let us now pass on to the third and the last point, viz., whether Islam has been anticipated by the earlier apostles. The records of the earlier apostles are their scriptures. To the followers of those scriptures, it will be nothing short of a surprise to find that their prophets enjoined upon them to look for and believe in the Founder of Islam. I would first refer to the prophecy of Moses contained in Deuteronomy 18:18. God tells Moses:

"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their bretheren, like unto thee, and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."

It is obvious that the prophecy speaks of a prophet being raised, not out of the Israelites, but out of their bretheren, the Ishmaelites. It cannot apply to any of the Hebrew Prophets, for they were all Israelites. Similarly, it cannot apply to Jesus, for he too was an Israelite. It cannot apply to anyone except Muhammad, who was of the progeny of Ishmael.

Next we take up the prophecies of Jesus. He told his disciples:

1. "If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray to the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the spirit of Truth." (St. John 14-15-17).
2. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (St. John 16:17).
3. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth, is come he will guide you into all truth" (St. John 16:12-13).

These prophetic words of Jesus predict in unequivocal terms the advent of another prophet after him. The terms of the prophecy do not warrant the conclusion that they are applicable to the Holy Ghost, as the Christian theologians maintain. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you" are words too clear to need any comment. According to the New Testament the Holy Ghost used to visit people before Jesus, as well as in his time. Jesus himself, it is reported, received the Holy Ghost in the shape of a pigeon. Therefore the Comforter, who was to come only after Jesus had passed away, cannot be the Holy Ghost. He was undoubtedly another prophet, who was to come after the departure of Jesus. It must be borne in mind that the language which Jesus spoke was Aramaic. The original word used by him, which has been rendered into Greek as "Paraklete" (a more appropriate rendering would be "Periklutos") and into English as "Comforter", was *Mauhamana*, which is the Aramaic form of the

Holy Prophet's name *Muhammad*. In the prophecies quoted above, therefore, Jesus was clearly foretelling the advent of the Prophet of Islam. This is further confirmed by what we read in the Gospel of St. Barnabas. It is well known that the four Gospels, included in the Bible, were not the only ones that were written in the early years of the Christian era. There were many more, and one of these was the Gospel of St Barnabas, which was written by the apostle whose name it bears. In this Gospel (translated by Laura Ragg, Oxford 1907) we find the following:

“Then sayeth Jesus: ‘So secret is predestination, bretheren, that verily I say unto you, to none save one shall it be clearly manifest, he it is whom the nations look for, to whom the secrets of God are so manifest that, when he cometh into the world, blessed shall they be that shall listen to his words, because God shall overshadow them with His mercy, even as this plam-tree doth overshadow us.’ The disciples asked: ‘O Master! who shall that man be of whom thou speakest, who shall come into the world?’ Jesus answered: ‘He is Muhammad, the Messenger of God.’”

Jesus confessed that he had not come with the whole truth: he foretold the advent of Muhammad, whom he described as “the spirit of truth”, who would guide men into “all truth”. Moreover, he, the prophet to come, would “abide with them for ever”, that is he would be the last prophet, whose teaching and example would remain unaltered and a source of perfect guidance to mankind till the end of the world.

We now take up the prophecies of Zoroaster, the Prophet of Iran. Zoroaster gave the good news of the coming of a great prophet, who would give a new life to the world, and added:

“His name will be the Victorious, the *Soeshyant* (i.e., the merciful one), the *Astvat-ereta* (i.e., he who makes the people rise up). He will be *Soeshyant* because he will benefit the whole world. He will be *Astvatereta* because as a bodily creature and as a living being he will

stand against the destruction of the bodily beings, withstand the idolaters and finish up the errors of the *Mazdanians*" (Zend Avesta, Farvardin Yasht, xiii:17).

This prophecy can apply to no one but the Prophet Muhammad. It was he who gained a complete victory over his opponents and showed the utmost mercy to them. He fully and completely forgave all his oppressors and enemies. Indeed he was, as the Quran describes him, "a mercy for all the creatures". He totally abolished idolatry. His followers conquered Iran, finished up the errors into which the Mazdanians, or Zoroastrians, had fallen, and revived the original religion of Zoroaster, which in its essential teachings was not different from Islam.

Here is another prophecy, this one is from the Pahlavi Scriptures of Zoroastrianism:

"When the Persians will sink so low in morality, a man will be born in Arabia whose followers will upset their throne, religion and everything. The mighty stiff-necked ones of Persia will be overpowered. The house which was built (referring to the building of the Kaaba by Abraham) and in which many idols have been placed, will be purged of idols, and people will say their prayers facing towards it. His followers will capture the towns of Persia and Taus and Balkh and other big towns round about. People will fight one another. The wise men of Persia and others will join his followers" (Dasatir, xiv).

The advent of the Prophet Muhammad has also been foretold in the ancient Hindu Scriptures. Among the many sacred books of Hinduism, the Vedas hold the highest authority. A person cannot be called a Hindu unless he believes in the Divine authority of the Vedas. In the Kuntap Sakt of the Atharva Veda (Chapter 20), we find the following prophecy:

"O people! Listen to this respectfully. The man of praise will be praised among the people. We take the Emigrant in our shelter from sixty thousand and ninety

enemies, whose conveyance are twenty camels and she camels, whose loftiness of position touches the heaven and lowers it" (Atharva Veda 20:1-2).

The phrase "the Man of Praise" is a literal translation of the Arabic word *Muhammad*. That this prophecy refers to the Prophet of Islam becomes further clear when we find that this "Man of Praise" has been called "the Emigrant", who would fly from his enemies and take shelter in a town far from his birth-place. It is well known that the turning point in the Prophet Muhammad's career came when he fled from Mecca, from the drawn swords of his enemies, who were bent upon slaying him and wiping out Islam, and took shelter in Madina. This event (the Hijrah) is so important in Islamic history that the Muslim calendar begins from this date. It is the beginning of a new era.

In another collection of Hindu Scriptures, the *Puranas*, the Prophet's advent has been again foretold:

"A *malechha* spiritual teacher (i.e., belonging to a foreign country and speaking a foreign language) will appear with his companions. His name will be Muhamad. Raja Bhoj after giving this Maha Dev Arab (of angelic disposition) a bath in the Panchgavya and the Ganges water (i.e., purging him of all sins), offered him the presents of his sincere devotion and, showing him reverence, said, 'I make obeisance to thee, O ye the pride of mankind, the dweller in a desert (Arabia). You have collected a great force to kill the Devil and you yourself have been protected from the *malechha* opponents. O ye, the image of the Most High God, the biggest Lord, I am a slave to thee, take me as one lying at thy feet' (Bhavishya Purana, Prati Sarg Parv III:3, 3, 5-8).

Last of all we take up the prophecy of Buddha, the greatest Prophet of India. He referred to the Holy Prophet Muhammad as "Maitreya Buddha", and said:

"Now in those days, bretheren, there shall arise in the world an Exalted One by name Maitreya (the Merciful One), an Arahant, a Fully Enlightened One, endowed with wisdom and righteousness; a Happy One, a world-knower, the peerless Charioteer of men to be tamed, a Teacher of the devas and mankind, an Exalted One, a Buddha like myself. He of his own abnormal powers shall realize and make known the world, and the worlds of the devas, with their Maras, their Brahmas, the host of recluses and brahmins, of devas and mankind alike, even as I do now. He shall proclaim the true religion lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle, and lovely in the end thereof. He shall make known the wholly perfect life of righteousness in all its purity, both in the spirit and in the letter of it, even as I do now" (Digha Nikaya, III:76).

VI

In conclusion, let me point out that one who would profess any particular religion does not completely justify himself by merely saying that his religion acknowledges and incorporates all others and is anticipated by them. These are no doubt among the things he must show. But he must further show that the religion he professes would bear examination of its intrinsic merits. As a professor of Islam. I maintain that this system — with its faith in the unity of God and in the prophets of all nations, its doctrine of the universal brotherhood of mankind and its scheme of salvation which requires complete self-surrender to the purpose of God and utmost exertion to do good to others as the way to eternal felicity — will fully bear such examination. In fact, when dealing with the second of my points, I have indicated why I should maintain a position of this kind. Why the point does not seem to emerge out of this small booklet of mine is that I am alive to an opinion which many people have that, as far as the original teaching of religious systems is concerned, there is little to choose between one and another of them. I would subscribe to this view only with an important qualification. Though, according to me, all religious messages have provided Divine light to men in different ways, the degree of illumination imparted through

individual prophets has, I believe, steadily enlarged and intensified, until it has had its climax in Islam.

Let me, however, briefly say that part of the inquiry into the intrinsic merits of religion will consist of the question whether the exponent of an alleged perfect religion is also a perfect exemplar. I should have liked to dilate upon the profound significance of the twofold career of the Holy Prophet of Islam, but I am prevented from doing so by considerations of space. Broadly speaking, there are two sets of moral qualities — those that get exhibited under circumstances of adversity, and those that get exhibited under circumstances of prosperity or success. The test of the qualities of fortitude and endurance can only be had in situations of adversity. On the other hand, the test of the qualities of forgiveness, meekness and love for the enemy can only be had in situations in which the exemplar is endowed with the power to punish his persecutors. The Holy Founder of Islam was, during the first thirteen years of his mission, in conditions under which he suffered extreme torture, persecution and boycott, and during the last eight or ten years in conditions of comparative triumph. Without either of these two types of conditions being afforded to him, one or the other of the two sets of moral qualities would have remained unexhibited. Not without extreme torture during his Meccan life at the hands of his persecutors could he have established his virtues of fortitude and endurance which he had. Nor without the power to punish his persecutors, at the time of the subsequent re-entry into Mecca at the head of 10,000 followers, could he have established his qualities of forgiveness and mercy which he also did. He passed through many different circumstances of life, but always remained pure of heart, modest, sincere, truthful, faithful, upright, kind, compassionate and full of zeal for God and the truth. He was the greatest humanitarian the world has ever known. He enjoined upon his followers: "Do you love your Creator? Love your fellow-creatures first." "All God's creatures are His family, and he is the most beloved of God who tries to do the greatest good to His creatures."

To those, however, who think there is, in fact, nothing to choose between the various systems, I would suggest that, after

all, it is on the whole, better to profess that one of them which includes profession of and belief in all of them; and Islam, according to my showing, is no doubt such religion.

I would sum up by saying that a Muslim regards all the other prophets as blessed with Divine light. A Muslim who swerved by so much as a hair-breadth from this position will not be a Muslim. Accordingly, he looks upon and reveres the Holy Founders of Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, etc., as true and great Apostles of God. I should be much interested to know if others, whose profession is different from mine, are prepared to take a reciprocal position in regard to the Holy Prophet of Islam.

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